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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

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National Intelligence Council

MEMORANDUM FOR: Distribution

FROM: Robert Blackwell  
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SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS ON THE PARTY CONFERENCE

Intelligence community representatives met on 6 July to make a preliminary assessment of the results of the 28 June - 1 July Soviet party conference. While all agreed that it is too early to draw any final conclusions about the impact of the conference, sharply divergent views were expressed on the implications of the conference for Gorbachev and his agenda. The report below reflects this discussion as well as published commentary of the various agencies.

BOTTOM LINE: Most analysts believe Gorbachev emerged a net winner from the meeting, with his authority enhanced and his reform agenda likely to accelerate in the months ahead. They believe that if the political reforms endorsed by the conference are effectively implemented over the months and years ahead, moreover, the meeting could prove to be a watershed event in Soviet political history.

Some analysts find this assessment too positive for Gorbachev: they continue to believe he is effectively stalemated by conservatives in the leadership, see the conference as largely a wash, and doubt if the event will prove to have any lasting impact in the long run.

DISCUSSION: All agree that Gorbachev did not get the breakthrough he may originally have hoped for when he proposed the conference in January 1987. There were numerous signs of compromise in the resolutions and speeches that suggest he still has many obstacles to overcome before he gets through the "line of scrimmage". There are disagreements, nonetheless, on conference dynamics, the strength of the message to the party and society, the prospects for implementing resolutions that are still largely rhetorical and the boost Gorbachev gained from the proceedings.

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The Minority Perspective. Some analysts believe that the evidence of compromise in the conference resolutions and the lack of any change in the party's leadership bodies sends a more ambiguous signal, reassuring fence-sitters that they still have high-level protection at the top. In their view:

-- Party conservatives were probably reassured by the relatively "centrist" posture Gorbachev adopted, rejecting Yeltsin, reaffirming the dangers of "adventurism", and cautioning against excesses of glasnost.

-- The failure of the resolutions to list the expanded powers of the new "President", the re-certification of party members, or precisely how the party apparatus will be reorganized indicate that these issues are not settled and may not be resolved in Gorbachev's favor.

-- Second Secretary Ligachev, widely assumed in the party to be impeding key elements of Gorbachev's agenda, emerged from the conference unscathed and the speeches at the conference itself make clear that the party remains fundamentally divided over how far those reforms should go and how fast.

-- Most importantly, the failure of the conference (or an accompanying Central Committee plenum) to announce any changes in the Central Committee, Secretariat, or Politburo is a clear setback.

The Majority View. While recognizing these limitations, most analysts, believe that the conference still strengthened Gorbachev politically, blessed measures which could significantly change the Soviet political system if effectively implemented, and had a significant impact on the party rank and file as well as the country at large. In their view:

-- The conference has made clear that the party apparatus is under seige. Gorbachev and the reformers see the apparatus, with its conservative thinking and entrenched habits, as the main obstacle standing in the way of successful implementation of political and economic reform.

-- The conference's endorsement of measures to truncate the apparatus, reorganize its structure, and make the proceedings of local party organs more open to public scrutiny represent a mortal threat to the party apparatus and its traditional role.

-- In addition to approving the proposals for reform in Gorbachev's speech, the conference resolutions strengthened reform proposals published in draft in mid-May--removing loopholes in some cases (no

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exceptions allowed to the two term rule for party and state office holders; competitive multi-candidate elections are made a requirement, not an option) and adding new elements in others (endorsing Gorbachev's proposals for a new, more powerful national legislature and an elected President with enhanced powers).

-- The unexpected openness and frank debate of the proceedings at least temporarily had a positive impact on a broad spectrum of ordinary citizens that Gorbachev must reach if his program is to go forward and, more importantly, could prove to set a powerful example, making it difficult for party leaders at the lower levels to continue to run their affairs in the old way.

-- Soviet officials have confirmed that Gorbachev will stand as the party's candidate for the Presidency, giving him expanded authority and a power base less dependent on the party apparatus.

LOOKING AHEAD. The pace of political developments in Moscow is likely to pick up in the wake of the conference. The conference resolutions express impatience with the extent of change on both the political and economic fronts.

-- They establish ambitious deadlines that will force the issue over the next year (a party plenum on implementation issues this month; new party elections beginning in August; the party apparatus to be reorganized and slimmed down by the end of the year; a new, more powerful parliamentary body and President to be in place by next April, and a new Soviet structure in place in the regions by the following Fall).

-- There may also be a new push on a number of policy fronts after the conference. In particular, the heavy emphasis it received in Gorbachev's speech, the final resolutions, and the Politburo meeting following the conference suggests that improving the supply of food and other consumer goods will be a dominant item on the leadership's agenda.

A WATERSHED? Whether this party conference proves to be a watershed event will depend on subsequent developments on two fronts:

-- As the history of Soviet reforms (and Gorbachev's own efforts to date) show, announcing revolutionary changes is one thing, and implementing them another. If the conference's promises of movement are not followed up relatively quickly with more specific steps, whatever the boost Gorbachev has received from the proceedings will not last long. The specific benchmarks for implementation set out by the conference resolutions should provide us some early tests of how things are going.

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-- More leadership change in the party's leading bodies will also be necessary if the reforms sanctioned in the conference resolutions are to be effectively implemented. The proposal to have Gorbachev stand as candidate for President next spring appears to clear the way for Gromyko's retirement from the leadership. The proposal for a new strengthened party control commission (a watchdog body) could open the way for the removal of Mikhail Solomentsev, the head of the present control commission and a subject of criticism from at least two delegates at the conference. These moves would weaken further the position of conservative forces in the Politburo.

-- The plenum at the end of this month will provide a forum for possible movement on both the policy and personnel fronts. Gorbachev made clear in his concluding speech to the conference that he wants the meeting to take more specific steps to implement the general promises of reform contained in the conference resolutions. On the personnel front, he needs to elevate cadres secretary Razumovskiy to full Politburo membership, thereby eroding Ligachev's responsibility for personnel issues and expanding the number of "senior secretaries" (those holding full membership in the Politburo simultaneously). Although less likely, the plenum could also deal with unfinished business of removing some of the 50-odd "dead souls" from the Central Committee and perhaps replacing some of them by promoting current candidate members.

*Robert Blackwell*

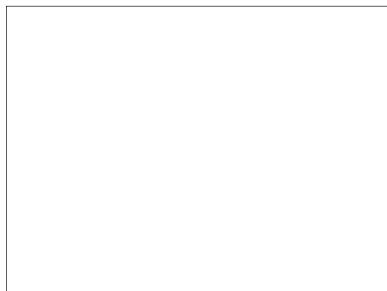
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SUBJECT: Warning Assessment--USSR

Outside Attendees

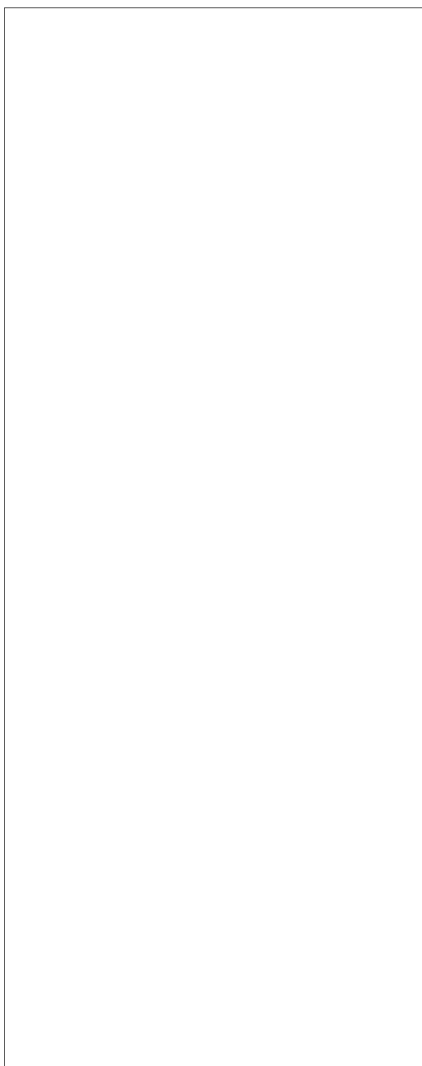


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Inside Attendees

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